
*Leading Health Care
In The 21st Century*



Acute Pain

You are in the driver's seat:
on the road to good pain relief



Preparing for Your Trip

Good pain relief following surgery, trauma, injury, or a painful medical condition is an important part of healing. Pain feels different to everyone. Methods used for pain relief vary for different causes of pain. Talk to your doctor or nurse about a good plan to relieve your pain.

Many patients have fears about taking pain medication (such as opioids). It is very rare for someone with NO history of addiction problems to develop drug addictions when taking opioids for acute pain after surgery or physical injury.

Things to Discuss Before Surgery

- Your concerns about surgery and the pain it may cause
- Your previous experiences with pain and pain relief
 - ◆ What worked well for you?
 - ◆ What did not work to help your pain in the past?
- Any prescription medication, vitamins, herbs, over-the-counter medications, or other family remedies you are taking
- Drug allergies or reactions you have had to medications in the past

Warning Sign

It is common for patients who take opioid pain medication on a regular basis before surgery to require larger amounts of opioid medication to feel comfortable after surgery. It is important for you to discuss this with your surgeon before having your surgery. It may also be helpful to discuss this openly with the nursing staff caring for you in the hospital.

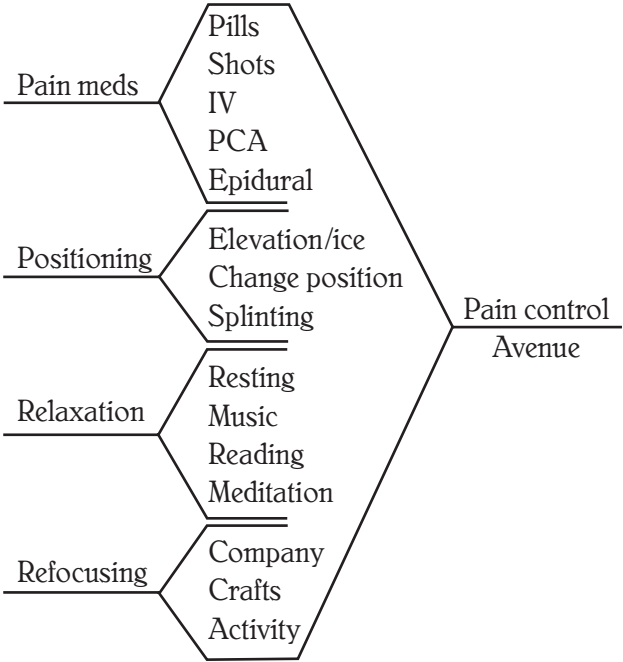
On The Road

Complete relief from pain is not always possible but it is important to be comfortable. Always ask for help with pain relief before the pain becomes too severe. Good relief from pain may actually speed your healing and recovery time.



There are many different avenues you can choose to have good relief from acute pain.

Avenues To Pain Relief



Oral Pain Tablets

You may be given oral medications to control your pain. Most tablets take at least 60 minutes to reach full effect. The goal of good pain relief is to prevent the pain from getting more severe. After surgery, it is best to take the first dose of medication **before** you start feeling a lot of pain. For the first few days after surgery, medication should be taken every 4-6 hours to obtain the best pain relief. As your body heals, you will then be able to slowly lengthen the time between each dose of medication.



Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

Patient controlled analgesia (PCA) provides good pain relief for acute pain while in the hospital. PCA allows you to push a button on a special pump containing pain medication. The pump dispenses your medication through a small tube in your vein. The medication works within a few minutes and is able to control even severe pain when used correctly. Safety features on the pump make sure that you do not receive too much medication at one time.

It is important that you tell your nurse if your medicine isn't working. Sometimes your medication needs to be adjusted for better pain control. When you are able to eat and drink, you will be started on oral tablets prior to discharge.

Warning Sign

The patient should be the only person that pushes the button to dispense the pain medication. For your safety, it is best if family members or staff do not push the button for you. Although it may be well intentioned, doing so could cause serious side effects such as over sedation or breathing problems.



Epidural Catheter

An epidural catheter is a tiny, soft tube placed in your lower spine to deliver pain medication. Epidural pain medication works very well with most types of surgery. An epidural is commonly used for 1-3 days after surgery. This type of procedure does not keep you from lying on your back or side. When the catheter is removed, you will be given another type of pain medication such as PCA or tablets.



Making Your Trip Even Better

There are other tools you can use with medication to improve your comfort. These should never replace the use of pain medication. Listening to music, doing relaxation exercises, having a massage, applying heat or cold often help to relieve pain. These tools not only can reduce pain but also relax your body and calm your mind while you are healing and can make your recovery easier. If you are able, it is helpful to practice relaxation skills before you are actually having pain. There is a selection of relaxation videotapes available through the “On Demand” system on the television in your room. Your clinician or nurse can help you find more information on this if you are interested.

Sidetracked or Lost Along the Way?

Get back on the road to pain relief by:

- Learning to ask for your medication when you first feel pain
- Keeping a pain diary to record when you have pain and how bad the pain is
- Using the 0-10 pain scale to tell staff about your level of discomfort (0 means you have no pain and 10 means the worst pain you can imagine)
- Using some of the following words to describe your pain:
 - ◆ Stabbing
 - ◆ Aching
 - ◆ Burning
 - ◆ Shooting
 - ◆ Tingling
 - ◆ Constant
 - ◆ Intermittent
 - ◆ Severe
 - ◆ Unbearable
- Report other symptoms such as nausea or constipation as soon as you notice them. They may be side effects of your pain medications.



On the Journey Home

Taking pain medications while you are at home may be an important part of your recovery. Taking your medication as ordered will help you feel more comfortable while getting better.

When taking pain medication at home:

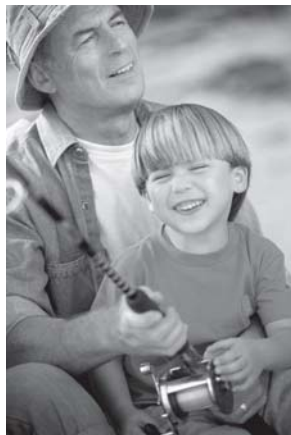
- Know your pain treatment plan before you leave the hospital
- Include some of the non-medication avenues of pain control
- If you are taking an opioid medication for pain relief take only as directed
 - ◆ Prevent constipation by increasing your intake of water, juice, fruit, vegetables and fiber. If you do not have a bowel movement at least every other day, you may need to request a stool softening medication from your clinician.
 - ◆ Do not drink alcohol
 - ◆ Do not drive your car (your medication may cause drowsiness)
- Call your clinician if your pain becomes more severe while following all the avenues of pain control



Pleasant Memories of Your Road Trip

Everyone wants to have good memories of a well-planned trip. There are many benefits of getting good pain relief from acute pain

- Increased ability to move
- Improved ability to breathe deeply
- Faster wound healing
- Improved sleep and mood
- Shorter time spent in the hospital



Pamphlet endorsed by the VISN 2 Pain Management Advisory Council with special thanks to the Same Day Surgery Team at Syracuse VA Medical Center for developing the concept of this brochure.

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VA Medical Centers:

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